The Wormfather

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Andy Davidson - the myth, the legend, the concrete donkey progenitor - is the DJ annelids have to thank for elevating their social standing from primitive, writhing dirt-munchers to the formidable, jocular, diminutive warmongers we know them to be today. He's the man who needs no introduction, yet here it is anyway because that's the way this line works. It goes without saying really.

From its humble beginnings as the daydream of a sole college boy, bedroom programmer, Worms morphed from a clone of early Scorched Earth style artillery games - coded on a Casio graph-plotting calculator merely for the joy of warping its original function - into a full-blown commercial release backed by one of the most revered developer-publishers of all time.

The Amiga game critics of the time wanted to walk Worms down the aisle and put a ring on its finger, all with the exception of Amiga Power who published a mean-spirited, tedious review, and awarded it a meagre 60% score, somewhat due to an ongoing spat they were engaged in with

Team 17. Regardless, Worms sold in excess of five million copies globally, and in the twenty-one years since its inaugural release, has spawned twenty-four sequels and spin-off titles. The stand-out highlight for me was 'Worms Ballet: Pirouette Pickles'. For better or worse, IP owners Team 17 show no hints of retiring their golden worm cash-cow any time soon.

I was a reluctant PC gamer by the time Worms hit Electronics Boutique's enticing display shelves. Not that I had any qualms when it came to becoming totally absorbed with Andy's plat du jour. My fondest memory would have to be staying up all night sparring against three friends at a new year's eve party. I was just old enough to drink and get away with it, yet not quite old enough to do it in a pub. There's little to match the potent concoction of booze, good mates and the all-consuming urge to taunt them with a hackneyed regional accent and then blow them limb from limb with an exploding sheep! Did any of us pay any heed to the midnight chimes of Big Ben or 'Auld Lang Syne'? I think you already know the answer to that one.

PETROL BOMB (0)

With the prototype showing promise, Andy switched development to the *slightly* more capable Amiga platform, and began toying with ways of injecting unique personality into his sprites. Prior to hitting upon his own niche, as a place holder of sorts, Andy had ripped the protagonists from Psygnosis's Lemmings using a purpose-built tool of his own called 'Jack the Ripper'. Knowing this wouldn't wash with the copyright police, the allegedly suicidal critters were smushed into the nearest phone box. A couple of light-speed revolutions later, they emerged bleary-eyed with wonder looking distinctly wormlike. The logic being that annelids had yet to star in their own game, and could be moulded into characters as charming and well animated as the green-haired rodents Andy so admired.

'Lemartillery' (another that'll do for now contrivance) would require a new name to further distance it from claims of copyright infringement, so at this stage it was rechristened 'Total Wormage', presumably in homage to 'Total Carnage', and shared amongst his college mates to glean their verdict. Andy's never-ending, social, artillery strategy game turned out to be so insanely addictive his whole class was playing it to excess to the detriment of their course work. It was summarily banned by his form teacher, making the forbidden fruit all the more alluring. Andy knew he'd struck gold, quit his A-level art course and began ruminating on the possibility of having it published.

Amiga Format magazine were running a 'design a Blitz Basic game' competition at the time (see issue 52, November

1993) so Andy thought this would be the perfect foot in the door, and possibly win him one of two Amiga 4000s! He was dead wrong; they totally dismissed his creation in favour of an unremarkable clone of Exidy's 1977 coin-op game, Circus. In it you play as a clown manipulating a see-saw to catapult another clown into rows of balloons lodged at the top of the screen. You're awarded a varying range of points dependent on which colour balloons you burst and how you go about it. If this sounds a lot like a twist on Atari's 'Breakout', it's because it is. Andy must have been gutted to have his masterpiece sidelined in favour of such guff.

Undeterred he sent a copy to several publishers, only to be knocked back on each occasion. Nevertheless, as a last-ditch attempt, in September 1994 he took his game along to the Electronic Computer Trade Show in London where Team 17 had a stand. He demonstrated it for them expecting little enthusiasm, yet to his astonishment, they loved it and offered him a publishing deal without hesitation.

Andy joined Team 17 in Wakefield, Yorkshire, to pursue development of his fledgeling title. It should have marked the beginning of a glittering career, though as fate would have it, of all the titles in the franchise's burgeoning anthology, Andy would only contribute to the initial release of the now truncated 'Worms', and the follow-up, 'Worms: The Director's Cut' released in 1997, before leaving the company owing to 'artistic differences'.

What these comprised hasn't been covered in the press in any great depth, though before the official support forums were mothballed in June 2013, Team 17 co-founder Martyn 'Spadge' Brown gave us a rare glimpse into when and where it all went wrong for the Worminator.

"Andy left mid-1998, to pursue another game idea which we didn't really believe would work - and therefore had a

clash of opinions. It's a shame that things couldn't have been more amicable, but he was young and in many cases naive about how games were made and that times were changing - he couldn't spend 4 years pottering away in his room on a new idea anymore.

He didn't really work on Worms Armageddon and seemed to lose interest in the Worms series (apart from his Amiga Directors Cut, since he was still controlling all code for that) during Worms 2.

I think looking back, it was just the fact that for Worms to go on and improve, expand, get bigger and do more things, Andy would have to let go and let others 'in' and I think he found this very difficult, if not impossible and the way he 'retreated' to do another Amiga version is probably an explanation.

Team 17 is in contact with Andy via his representative in terms of our legal obligations/agreements but there has been no personal contact with him for almost 6 years."

It was insinuated by a fan of Andy's work that Team 17 had taken the designs of a green bedroom coder, stifling his ambition and creativity, whilst not sharing his passion for his four-year labour of love. In his defence, Martyn responded:-

"I've no idea how far Andy took things with his own stuff when he left - he just didn't 'get' where we were coming from and didn't accept how things were - not only with us, but with publishers too. Publishing and the games industry as a whole had changed/moved on and Andy hadn't - it seemed to be as simple as that.

In terms of taking risks, we'd took a considerable one pushing Worms so hard in a marketplace that was 3d, 3d, 3d... so it's a little unfair to suggest we didn't do that

(particularly since our release history until then was littered with 'risks'). He was given every opportunity to develop and present his new idea but I have to say that when it was eventually revealed it just wasn't going to make it.

It's also unfair to suggest that others didn't have the same enthusiasm for Worms - I think it's evident enough in Worms 2 and WA what people thought of the game - engineering like that doesn't happen by accident. It's also unfair to the team as a whole who all contributed massively to Worms in terms of ideas, suggestions, tweaks and suchlike.

Andy had made things clear that unless we were going to do things his way, then he wasn't going to play ball - so we went our separate ways - it was never going to work out how he wanted it to.

It's a shame how things worked out but he was given a chance to develop his new idea and left to pursue it in his own time. It also came at a time when Andy had been left behind in a technical sense (the original Amiga Worms was an Amiga Blitz Basic program) and the visual/technical demands had become far greater."

It was put to Martyn by the same forum member that Team 17 haven't really advanced Andy's original concepts, or pushed the boundaries of creativity and innovation with the subsequent sequels.

"Nothing taken badly, you speak fairly - Worms is sometimes both a boon and a burden to us in that we're lucky we've got the flexibility with the series, but yes, sometimes doing something new would be great for everyone in the studio.

Of course it was tough on Andy to 'let go' (or at least open the door to teamwork) but his inability to do it isolated him pretty quickly. I think one problem was that Andy effectively hit the jackpot with his first project (not that he ever planned to - initially he was happy just to have it published/further developed) and just assumed everything that was happening was the norm. In terms of difficulty letting go, I can only assume that a significant financial arrangement made the pill easier to swallow."

Having left Team 17 little is known of what came next for the talented coder. With a wad of cash in his pockets and no responsibilities, I expect he headed for a tropical resort post-haste to be fanned with 24-carat gold palm leaves wielded by foxy, angelic mermaids, while nourished with Pop-Tarts served on silver platters (come on, nobody *really* likes caviar).

In 2000 Andy set up Twisted Development Ltd, and first surfaced in 2004 when he registered the domain name slightlytwisted.co.uk, though it only hosted the optimistic promise that "the worm will return..."

In April 2007 Andy opened an iBar in his home town, Bournemouth in Dorset, the intention being to combine his two fondest pastimes; technology and music. The promotional flyer blurb elucidates the premise better than I ever could:-

- We are Bournemouth's cutting-edge, independent bar and club.
- Bringing bars and clubs into the digital age, it's time to level up.
- Never be stuck for a song name again, the bar will tell you what it is.
- Realtime generation of visuals.

- Enjoy gigs online if you can't make it, or if you want to relive the night.
- Free internet and Wi-Fi while you drink.
- Download exclusive audio and video content to your phone or laptop whilst in the bar for free.
- Weekly nights where you know what you are getting. No trying to please everyone, we just want to keep you and us happy.
- Hear new music created in the club in front of you from the ground-up.
- If you can create it, we can exhibit it.
- Total creative freedom, a way of getting your work out to people who appreciate it, with no middleman to mess things up.
- A showcase for the digital generation.
- And this is just the beginning...

In January 2009, Andy started a blog to accompany his events with the promise to make available some exclusive tracks by the talent he was now hosting at his club.

With a lineup that included live performances from Kenny Thomas, ASWAD ('Don't Turn Around'! Remember that no. 1?) and Mari Wilson, the venture appeared to be going from strength to strength, especially given that the opening of a second iBar in Camden, London had been announced in the same year. Surely enough, this was opened in the disused 'New Bull and Butcher' pub building in Totteridge, London, followed by further club venues at Sutton Coldfield in the West Midlands and Grimsby in North East Lincolnshire.

Regrettably, the company was struggling financially, not least due to a £500,000 investment in refurbishing the Bournemouth venue, and in December 2009 a petition to wind up 'iBar Digital Bars Ltd' was issued by Bournemouth Borough Council. Nevertheless, the Bournemouth iBar didn't

officially close down until August 2011, the recorded reason being that it failed to meet the council's electrical safety regulations. The Anvil rock bar has since taken its place.

In February 2011 Martyn Brown announced his departure from Team 17, ending his 20-year association with one of the most prosperous games development studios in the world, to pursue a career as an independent video game consultant.

Perhaps not so coincidentally, in April 2012 Andy was given the opportunity to return to the company to spearhead the development of Team 17's latest addition to the franchise he set in motion as a teenager; 'Worms Revolution'.

Andy, clearly elated to be back at the helm, wrote of his comeback on the NeoGAF forums:-

> "I'd missed my baby, and after going back last week to see Revolution (and spend a good time catching up and talking about things in the pub!) it finally felt the right thing to do."

The environment at Team 17 now is much closer to how I personally felt games should be made, and being self-published also means there is more freedom to be creative and take risks. Which is all I've ever wanted to do really. I feel the industry at the moment needs independent studios to be strong, and to foster as much creativity as possible.

Revolution is also very refreshing when you see it as well, the series needed a bit of life injected to it after all this time and I will help with that as much as I can.

> "I'm very conscious of keeping the feel and balance of the game correct, and this is the focus of the team over the coming months which I will also be helping with. One of the first things I did on getting back to Bournemouth was

> dig out an old document I wrote commonly referred to as the Bible Of Worms ;)
>
> It's good to be back!"

At the suggestion that Worms has had its day, Andy countered:-

> "Well one of the other reasons for returning is the game that's been in my head for the past 14 years, and been evolved and refined over that time. Worms was meant to be a trilogy, with Armageddon called that because it was the last one. I didn't get to finish it back then, which is why I felt I had to walk away, but I'd also had the idea for a completely new game. It's born from the same philosophy as Worms, but very different and the mechanics I find fascinating.
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> I'm looking forward to getting a prototype of that up and running at some point. There's an awful lot in my head that needs to get out! Name, gameplay, character design, it's all there.
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> When the time comes for it to be revealed, I promised GAF I would post the teaser image here first, and I will stick to that :)"

For devotees of the original 'Andy era' games, 'Revolution' marked a welcome return to 2D turn-based gameplay, albeit rendered with a new 3D engine. It was released in October 2012 for Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 with ports for OS X and PlayStation Vita made available the following year.

The classic Worms gameplay was generally well-received, earning 'Revolution' a Metacritic score of 73% across 16 reviews.

While Team 17 hinted that Andy was to stay on board to continue developing new game ideas, it's not clear what other projects he has been involved in more recently. What *can* be said is that none of Team 17's post-2012 releases bear Andy's name amongst their credits.

Early in 2007 Andy was a curious fixture in the 'where are they now?' list. While in 2016 'DECK'ARD' classes himself as a digital DJ, and trail-blazes his own robot rock music label, 'iBar Records' (apparently he has yet to be sued by Apple!). In his own words, he's "in the business of life, love and music". Who needs Worms, eh?